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LANSING



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**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** State Board of Education

**FROM:** Ms. Jennifer Haberling, 2008-2009 Michigan Teacher of the Year

**SUBJECT:** Teacher of the Year Report

**In Hudsonville  
School Wide**

During our professional development time in March, we will begin to analyze our MEAP data in order to set SMART goals for the upcoming year. In addition, we have all been working with the guidance counselors to incorporate some team-taught lessons that touch on student issues like purpose and motivation. This has yielded a service project for the 8<sup>th</sup> graders involving collecting used books and games for a program in Grand Rapids. We are hoping to give our students the drive to think outside themselves, to be aware of issues of need around them, and to work to solve problems in the community they live in, all while connecting in a meaningful way to the content of their classes.

Our English department was inspired by hosting Dr. Rob Rozema from GVSU and Dr. Allen Webb from WMU for some technology training. They set up a Ning for our department and allowed us to vote electronically on the session topics for the day. Then they showed us a variety of web-based technology applications, allowed time for collaboration, encouraged time to play with the new ideas, and gave us suggestions for implementing these ideas into our classrooms. Their practical ideas allow students (and teachers) opportunities to expand the audiences for the writing they do in English classes and harness the excitement students have whenever technology is used for their assignments.

**In 7<sup>th</sup> Grade**

This past month was an imaginative journey with 7<sup>th</sup> graders as we began to read *Tangerine*, Edward Bloor's book about a family who follows their oldest son's football dreams from Texas to Florida. The book's narrator, Paul, the younger son in this family, is a fantastic soccer player, and throughout the story we learn that he is partially blind because of an accident that he can't

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remember. He struggles with what others think of him and begins to have brief encounters with the past that eventually help him to remember why he is blind: his older brother maliciously destroyed Paul's eyesight when Paul was only 5 years old. The end of the book reveals that symbolic blindness is worse than physical blindness, as readers learn that Paul can see reality more clearly than those with sight -- his parents and the other adults in the book.

As we read, we are focusing on symbolism and connecting the events in the story back to our essential questions (Can we see things as they really are? Should we? Is perception reality?). During reading, students learn that Paul believes parents often make up rules that they say benefit kids, but he questions the validity of some of them -- he calls himself the poster child for *don't swim after eating, don't look directly at the sun*. We are connecting to this idea by reading the children's book *The Secret Knowledge of Grown-Ups* by David Wisniewski. Students have brainstormed their own list of grown-up rules and worked out creative explanations for why adults really enforce these rules (like brush your teeth, don't jump on the bed, tie your shoes). While students were writing, we learned how to use participial phrases to enhance details and add sophistication to their writing. In addition, students focused on their use of specific words to convey meaning. They published their final stories in a collection that mimics Wisniewski's book.

Throughout this whole unit of study, I have the privilege of working with students on some character education highlights, including issues dealing with bullying and self-image that tie in to the reading directly. Adding this personal connection and real-world thinking helps them to imaginatively practice and trouble-shoot scenarios that occur in their real lives through our discussions and some role playing.

### **In 8<sup>th</sup> Grade**

Eighth graders are just beginning my favorite classic book, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee. Although the story takes place in the Great Depression in the South, we will make connections across time and space in order to bring to light the issues from the book that still resonate today. We will deal with issues such as racism, parenting, stereotypes, truth and beliefs. To add connections to *To Kill a Mockingbird*, we will also watch Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream," read an article from the Washington Post called "Truth: Can You Handle It," examine the press regarding the Duke University rugby players, and review several movie clips that relate to the book.

Students will begin the whole unit with an opinionnaire and discussion, which we will refer back to throughout our reading. Our focus throughout this unit will be on the following questions: Who controls our lives? How do people gain control? What is the best way to respond to a challenge? How do challenging situations shape who we are? Students will work through several reflective writing pieces about their town, their early childhood and issues that concern them. They will showcase these in an on-line blog forum, giving

them the ability to comment to one another and also show off their writing to a broader audience.

### **As MTOY**

I have been amazed at the communication between all of the state teachers of the year as we continue our journey together. We have shared ideas about building rapport with our students, handling the media, the kinds of writing we are doing this year as our state's TOY, and how to start the school year. We are using technology to better communicate through a NING and a Google Groups tool, as well as with Facebook.

I just finished writing an article for MEEMIC's newsletter, *The Educated Choice Update*. In the article (titled "Dreams of the Future"), I discuss the need for teachers to be forward thinking and imaginative when it comes to designing engaging experiences for all of the students we have in our classes. I also touch on the fact that while our world is evolving, the skills students need (like the ability to think, problem solve, and create) are not changing.

I spoke to a group of pre-service teachers at Grand Valley State University in Dr. Brian White's ED 331 class about planning thematic units in English classes. While I was there, I introduced the idea of planning with the end in mind, so that all of the experiences students have while in a course of study relate to the desired end result. This kind of scaffolding is challenging, but makes for much more focused instruction and more cohesive day-to-day lessons.

I will be meeting with a group including Sally Vaughn, Tom White, Jean Shane, and Dave Borth to discuss how the Network of Michigan Educators (NME) might be involved with the re-imagining project set forth by the Board and Superintendent Flanagan. I would like to see us use some of the strategies that Mike Schmidt of the Ford Foundation calls the "innovation toolbox" that is used at the Ford Schools, as well as the community conversation format from The Center for Michigan with a focused group of educators, policy makers, and union leaders. I believe that using the tools we discussed at the NME Annual Conference in December would make a great starting point for discussing the kinds of change that can make exciting steps in the re-imagining process.